JOIN THE **WORD-WATCHERS**!

"Neighborhood Watch" is one of many citizen-self-security organizations alerting householders in an area to report to the police any suspici- ous characters/activities anyone notices in the area. PROBLEM: The "watch" is only as effective as the neighborhood is a community: if you don't know your neighbors, they all look like suspicious characters up to no good! From that neighborhood-security title I've metaphor- ed to **word-watchers**, Christians who notice, & report on, suspicious words currently polluting the Chris- tian language-world deliberately (by infiltration) or because the guards have failed (so, by seepage). ...For "infiltration" & "seepage," see Thinksheet #2654.1. This Thinksheet--as promised in #2654.7-- moves from theory to application.

     The other life-root of my word-watchers metaphor is birding: "bird-watchers" (1) study familiar birds in an area, (2) look for new birds, & (3) count populations (&, where a specific bird- population is in decline, search out what's causing the decline). See how **word-watchers** is illumined by this life-root? The Christian word-watcher will want to know more about familiar words in the Christian language, will want to learn unfamiliar words, & will worry about words that currently are less used & words that have disappeared (by "repression": #2654.5).
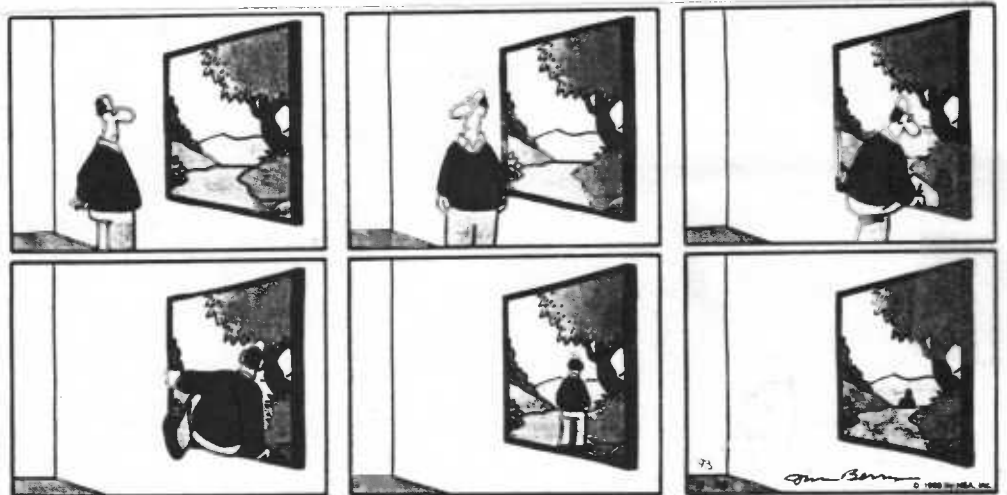
     All Christians should be concerned about the wholeness & health of the Christian language. Some of us, as linguistically advantaged, have a special obligation to be word-watchers on behalf of the Christian neighborhood-territory-community.

PROJECT: This Thinksheet uses the theory of #2654 to comment on, & illustrate, **the diction factor** in mainline-church **decline**. The categories here are "work spheres" (overlapping "language-worlds" & "semantic domains," #2654.6) from which alien expressions have entered the liberal Christian vocabulary, some of these expressions repressing native Christian terms. This language transformation occurs "when theology becomes preoccupied with the language-[general]society correlation," its "specifications derived directly from our social goals" (Leander Keck, THE CHURCH CONFIDENT, Abingdon/93, 54)....A few terms for each category:

PSYCHOLOGY

     self-esteem. This word is too fat to pass through Jesus' narrow gate (Mt.7.14), which--according to "Amazing Grace"--is designed for thin wretches with low self-esteem, the repentance requirement for faith-conversion. Since secularly managed high self-esteem correlates with atheism, self-esteem is a natural goal for our public schools, whose sanctional range does not include religion: God is unnec- essary to the goal. Church-school literature is Trojan when it lets this horse in. When I say this, many liberal Christians bristle: their reality has been altered to accomodate the self-esteem incentive. Welcoming this & other foreign words, they step out of Christianity into an alien language-world, as does Berry in this "Berry's World":

In   "Shadowlands," Rich.   Attenborough's film on C.S.Lewis, Joy Gresham's   9-year-old son is disappointed that he   could   not   walk through   the   back   of the   wardrobe   into Narnia, & Lewis' friends laughed at Lewis' "mag- ic" in inventing Narnia. But Wonderland & Oz & Middle Earth & Narnia are real-to-life: we can step into other worlds, &

sounds-words from other (language)-worlds can enter ours. And do we not each day, as we pray the Lord's Prayer, enter into God's Kingdom? If we go dumb, silent, on "the language of heaven," our own Christian talk in, between, & among us, we shall hear & hearken to the foreign words: they will get our attention if our own classical Christian words do not--& they will get, convert, us, for what gets your attention gets you. Jesus preaches self-denial, but I've heard some lib- eral Christians fight fiercely for "self-esteem."

POLITICS

     equality. This atheist term from the French Revolution has been baptized   +

into both the American civil religion & the mainline churches.   It's been falsely equated with biblical "equity" (as wholeness & health have been falsely equated with "holiness").   The Anglo-Saxon "equal before the law," the honorable phrase rightly describing the original impulse of the Civil Rights Movement, has been expanded to ontology (all equal in being, which is patently untrue), theology (all equal-before God, which is latently true), social theory (equal in opportunity), & economics (the socialist dream of equal wealth by the distribution of unequal wealth). The secular faith is that an increase in "equality" equals an increase in private & public virtue (which reminds me of the cynical definition of faith as belief in spite of evidence).   The implicit liberal religious faith is that "equality" increase equals piety increase: the more "equal" people are, the more they will worship God (a faith even more fatuous than the secular faith).   Irony: The success of "equality" would undercut piety, increase God-amnesia, & so call down the wrath of God. ...But many fear to criticize the holy words of political theolgy: they don't want to be politically incorrect, & they don't want to appear to be on the side of "the principalities & powers."

  liberation.   "From sin & death" is the classical Christian context of this word.   The Marxian class-war context is "from oppression," the primary meaning in political theology, which expands "oppression" to include racism, sexism, ethnism, & nationalism.   With the classical Christian context repressed, what does this political theology envisage as the post-"oppression" human condition? "Equality," doubtless.   But not piety, for "sin & death" have not been dealt with; so liberation without (full biblical sense, shalom) salvation.   So the wrath of God.

  justice.   How poor is "equality"-captured "justice" compared with biblical justice!   The former justice is an enemy of liberty, which is a friend of biblical justice (as in our nation's honored phrase, "liberty & justice [not "equality"] for all").   As for empowerment, biblically it's the work of the Holy Spirit in all believers; but politically it's a class-war term suffering the defects of its socialistic language-world, victimizing truth, unity, & freedom.   What I'm advocating here is not political quietism but linguistic clarity &, yes, purity: I'm arguing against letting the Christian language, which is love-led, be polluted by political patois, which is power-laden.   We have to do, as Niebuhr & Tillich & others have impressed on us, with love, power, & justice; let's not confuse them.

  rights/entitlements/responsibilities.   I like C.T.Vivian's word: "Freedom & responsibility are the same thing."

PHILOSOPHY

  Ground of Being, God beyond God, etc. Especially Tillich & the process theologians have depersonalized God, opening the way for expressions such as "Cosmic Energy" & (Keck) "God-Reality." Philsophy is nonparticular, personhood is particular (as the biblical God is particular: personal & masculine).   Feminism tries to deny one particular, masculinity, & affirm another, personality.   That split is untenable when we step into the world of the biblical God (as Berry into that pastoral landscape).   But the split is widely preached in the mainline churches

SOCIOLOGY

  elitism.   An excellence-despising, mediocrity-supporting term at odds with the biblical call to do one's best whatever one's talents, energy, & social location.

ECONOMICS

  the poor.   The rich biblical term is narrowed down by class-analysis to "the marginalized," "the disfranchised," "the victimized," "the disadvantaged." Cutting across all ecopolitical classes are those who are poor toward God (who've not opened to his riches) & those who are poor for God (as servants of God in solidarity with the needy of body, of soul, or of both).

RELIGION

  spirituality.   A vague, New-Agey antonym for tradition-&-institution-honoring piety, religion (disparagingly called "religiosity").   "Spiritual retreats" deftly sidestep biblical-theological-historical specifics & commitments.

So inadequate a word-watcher listing! But I mustn't exceed two pages.